

MEMORANDUM

June 15, 2000

To: Senator Gorton

From: Gorton Science Team*

Subject: Progress in hatchery reform

The group of scientists you appointed to advise you on hatchery reform have assumed different roles now that reform is underway thanks to your leadership. Several of us were selected by our agencies to represent them on the Hatchery Scientific Review Group (HSRG), and the others serve on the umbrella Coordinating Committee. Consequently we observe progress from different perspectives. We thought it would be useful to reconvene our group to discuss and understand our various views about the status of ongoing activities. Accordingly, we met last week as your science group, and the purpose of this memorandum is to provide you with our conclusions.

Because a central goal of this effort is to operate hatcheries with a science-based decision process, the capabilities of the HSRG are critical. Most of us were not personally acquainted with the Independent Scientists chosen for the HSRG. At this point all of us have seen them in action, and some of us work shoulder-to-shoulder with them. So far we are impressed with the results. This is clearly a case where the whole is more than the sum of its parts. The entire HSRG seems to be a balanced, compatible group who enjoy working together and who wholeheartedly believe in their task. One result has been more effort than we expected, and consequently greater progress. The support of Long Live the Kings and Jim Waldo and his staff has been superb and absolutely critical. We conclude that progress to date is beyond our expectations, which were very high. Our satisfaction is further reinforced by the positive feedback we are receiving from the public and media coverage.

We only identified one major concern in our meeting. You recall that in our initial budget proposal last year we asked that five million dollars be included for physically retrofitting hatcheries to allow them to conform to reform requirements. That funding was not included in the FY 2000 appropriation, after your staff explained to us, in your office in Washington, D.C. that it did not seem appropriate to begin structural changes until the nature of reform was more clearly defined and actions planned. We appreciate your commitment to make every attempt to include the five million dollars in the FY 2001 budget if sufficient progress was made. The excellent progress to date means there will be no question that we will be ready in the next budget year to begin constructing scientifically prioritized retrofits. We have significant concerns that by not beginning to provide substantial new funds for retrofitting hatcheries in FY 2001, there will be an immediate dampening impact on hatchery reform effort. The new Hatchery Scientific Review Group and the co-managers are all prepared to continue the

extraordinary progress made in only six months since the money became available. We feel as strongly as ever that hatchery reform, which must include physical as well as management changes, will provide the best bang for the buck among salmon recovery/ESA activities.

We believe the physical structures of hatcheries are one of the biggest threats that hatchery operations currently pose to wild salmon. Hatchery structures can hinder or prevent upstream passage of adults. Inadequately screened water intakes interrupt or prevent downstream migration of juveniles. These deficiencies occur because many of our hatcheries were designed and built over fifty years ago. Many do not meet present standards for fish passage, water withdrawal, or effluent water quality.

New rearing vessels also need to be constructed at some hatcheries so access is available for mass marking and subsequent selective fisheries. If the hatchery spring chinook from the mid-Columbia had been marked, they could have been targeted for harvest and we wouldn't have the issue of "clubbing" before us today.

The agencies have already begun to redesign some facilities (e.g. Dungeness and Issaquah). Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) informed the state legislature at a joint house hearing of the need for an increased Capital Budget over the next several bienniums to meet retrofitting needs in order to be in compliance with ESA. Some federal matching funds will greatly aid WDFW in their quest for these funds.

A conservative estimate for total retrofitting needs is 30-50 million dollars. WDFW has developed a scientific method to prioritize hatchery modifications. Formulas have been developed for Fish Passage and Screening Priority Indexes. These indexes take into account available spawning and rearing habitat production potential, species condition and health modifiers to prioritize less healthy stocks or species, and cost modifiers to give greater weight to the less costly projects for similar benefit. The tribes have also developed a prioritization process emphasizing science. Projects have been prioritized with these processes to assure accountability and obtain the greatest benefit for the dollars spent.

We believe that the view of exceptional progress in your hatchery reform program is widespread and offers a model for progressive, science-based hatchery management. We offer our congratulations, and look forward to watching not only further accomplishments, but also an increased public understanding of the significance of hatchery changes. We strongly urge you to push for capital dollars in this fiscal year to keep your reform effort moving.

** Gorton Science Advisory Team*

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